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2008

An Interview with Ron Textor

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

July 7, 2007 & October 8, 2007 Interview

All That Jazz Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of Harold L. Boyer Charitable Foundation. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *All That Jazz* Oral History Project.

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July 7, 2007 and October 8, 2007
in Las Vegas, Nevada
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All That Jazz Oral History Project



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Ronald D. Teptor 7/24/07

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Date

This is Claytee White. I'm with Ron -- Textor?

Textor.

Would you spell your last name for me?

T-e-x-t-o-r.

Textor, okay. And this is July 24th, 2007. About we're in his home in Summerlin.

So how are you doing today?

Doing fine, Claytee.

Good. I just want you to tell me a little bit about your early life - where you grew up, your family.

Well, I was actually born in Kirksville, Missouri, and shortly after that moved to Flint, Michigan. My father was a doctor and my mother was a music teacher in school. I started taking piano lessons when I was five years old and stopped doing that when I was eight and starting playing trombone.

Normal, typical growing up - I had an older brother, also was musically inclined. He gave it up in high school. I sort of - well, both of us got thrown out of band when I was high school. But right after that - ninth grade I attended the Stan Kenton clinics, Michigan State University. The following year, I attended the National Stage Band Camp at Cleveland at the Western Reserve University.

I continued on with my own - started my own band and was working when I was 14 years old in the Flint area. Became a member of the union there. Did a lot of work in the Flint area. Went to Central Michigan University. Graduated from high school in '65. Went to Central Michigan University right away. Continued to work in Flint and Detroit area and around Michigan. Graduated from Central Michigan with a bachelor's in music education degree in 1969.

And I was going to be drafted. That was during the Vietnam era. And they had told me that they would give me a deferment if I was going to teach public school. And the following fall I was set to have a graduate assistantship and teach college and get my master's and they wouldn't defer me for that. So I flew to Colorado Springs and auditioned for the NORAD Band, North American Air Defense Command

band, and was accepted there.

So I enlisted in the army and was stationed there for approximately three years. It was a unique band in the United States - matter of fact, in the world - because the band was army, navy, air force and Canadian. And we were basically goodwill ambassadors for North American Air Defense Command. And what we did was tour the North American continent doing concerts, radio shows, television appearances and recordings.

I got out of there in 1972 and went on the road with the Glenn Miller Orchestra under Buddy DeFranco.

But getting back to that now, that's a very well-kept secret. So you were able to serve your entire military commitment -

Yes. Right.

- playing your instrument.

There's a lot of guys in town that have done the same thing. A lot of them came from - well, a very good friend of mine - that's one of the reasons I am here. And that's a trumpet player by the name of Tom Snelson, who's playing lead with Phantom of the Opera right now. I met Tom as soon as I got to NORAD. And he was the one that got a call put through to me to join the Glenn Miller band. And then after years of really coaxing me, he convinced me that it was time to move out here. And that's one of the reasons I came here.

But there were a couple of other players at NORAD. I think they've left town since then. But you have a lot of musicians in this town that were with The Airmen of Note out of Washington, D.C., another military band that did the same thing. That was considered a special band; people that went into that band or the marine band in D.C. or the band at West Point. Those were considered special bands and you went in automatically with a rank of an E-5. But at NORAD, we didn't do that. We went in as just regular - you know, I started as a PFC.

How did you make rank?

Just the same way everybody does; you just waited until there were slots opening and you were recommended and approved for the promotion and eventually as one opened up - and, unfortunately at that time period, rank was made because we had so many troops being killed in Nam. And when a rank opened up because somebody got killed, then somebody got promoted.

Oh, so it didn't just have to be in your unit?

No, not at all. It was affective all over. So...But it was an interesting career there. And then the time with the Glenn Miller band...And that -

Tell me more about Glenn Miller.

I was under Buddy DeFranco. Spent approximately two years with him. I started out as a bass trombone player and after nine months quit. And went back to Colorado Springs. Got into real estate. Did a few gigs with the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra. And didn't like the real estate business. And they had an opening in the trombone section again. So I went back on third trombone. Then I moved into second trombone. I wound up playing the lead with them. So I covered the entire book with them. And we traveled all over the world.

Give me some of the places that you remember.

Well, the first nine months - I had been with them about seven months - we did an eight-week tour in Japan and did a recording at RCA Victor in Tokyo. That was finally mixed down about a year later and ready for release. But Buddy DeFranco announced that he was going to leave the band and they were going to get a new leader. So they didn't release it. That sat on the shelf for 25 years and then they finally released it as a CD. So it was pretty interesting.

We did 50 weeks a year of one-nighters. Very seldom did we - we had a couple of stints in Japan we were staying a week at a time in one location, especially when we were in Tokyo. We did a couple weeks at the St. Regis Roof in New York City. And that was for the anniversary of Glenn Miller's death. And it was also - let's see. I think that's when they released the book by George Simon on Glenn Miller.

But that must be tough doing those one-night stands.

Oh, it was. But at that age it was okay. I mean it was something that I had dreamt when I went to college about playing with a named band. So I accomplished that and recording. And then after I did the work with them - and like I said we were all over the country.

As a matter of fact, I just got back from a trip to Minneapolis-St. Paul where my nephew got married. And I was talking to a bartender back there and told him that I had been with the Miller band playing. And he said, "Oh, you were at the Medina Ballroom. And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, it's still there and they still bring in the big bands that are around." And they've added on. They've got a bowling alley to it and a game room and everything. I didn't get a chance to get out and see it. But, yeah, we did the old big ballrooms and that type of thing where all the big bands were playing.

How did you travel?

By bus. Everything was by bus. If the next engagement was further away than I think 5 or 600 miles and we had to play that night, then they had to fly us. But otherwise...A lot of times we did what they would call hit-and-runs. We'd play a job. And from the hotel we'd go to the job that was in that location and we'd play it. And we'd get on the bus and take off and drive all night. And then check into another hotel at about ten o'clock in the morning when we got there and then play that night. Hopefully spend that night there. If not, we'd do another hit-and-run and take off and go again.

So you did a lot of sleeping on the bus?

Oh, yeah. A lot of partying on the bus, too.

Tell me about the partying on the bus.

Oh, I mean it was just get on the bus and guys would immediately - and we had coolers. We had booze. We had beer. It was just - musicians - even working on the Strip, between shows it's partying and after the shows. Sammy threw about two or three parties a week for the orchestra and the stagehands. So it was just a - it's a dream life. You're doing what you want to do to make a living and it's just a party constantly.

How do you play when you've had a lot to drink?

You don't drink that much. You make sure that you're not drinking too much that you can't play your horn.

So you police yourself?

That's it. If you don't, somebody else is going to do it for you and then you're out of a job. So it's that simple. Everybody sort of expects that it's going to happen. But you just watch what you're doing. With some of the shows that are going on now like Phantom of the Opera and the difficulty of those shows, there would be no way that I'd be drinking before either one of those shows because they demand too much.

Explain to me what you mean by demanding too much.

The music is far more difficult than what we've seen as far as doing a star policy or something like that. I mean the only person that I worked in Vegas that we ever did two days of rehearsals for was Frank. And with Frank, we would rehearse the day before and the day of. But everybody else was usually - you'd go in the showroom in the afternoon, read the music down in a two-hour rehearsal, and do the show that night.

Your friend who convinced you to come to Las Vegas, what did he say to you?

Oh, he just kept saying - well, at that time after I left the Miller band, I went back to Central Michigan and got my master's degree in music, in performance, and a minor in theory on that. And then I taught college at Michigan at Central and I taught at Alma College. I did a short stint at Mott Community College and then went to Wisconsin and taught at Mount Scenario College in Wisconsin. And that was in the late 70s.

And that was when I quit teaching. I taught there one year. And when I started I was making \$10,500 a year. And the following year they were negotiating my contract. And I told them, I said, "I need 12,000 to live off of. I'm not going out and buy a new car." And they said, "Would you accept eleven-five?" And I told them where they could put their job and left.

I went back to Flint. And a friend of mine helped me. I went into the automobile factories and in six months working on an assembly line made \$18,000. The following summer I was set to go on supervision training for General Motors. And the day I was supposed to start that I got laid off.

And I was still playing in Michigan whenever I got a chance and doing whatever I could. And got together with a couple of real close friends that were musicians - a drummer, Joe Fryre. And I sat down with the Genesee County Fine Arts Council and I authored a federal grant under the CETA program. The CETA program was the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act for laid-off workers due to the Japanese imports and everything.

And the grant was accepted and it funded a 13-piece jazz group that was paid for by the federal government. And we promoted jazz as an art form for the entire area. We were invited to open the first Detroit Montreux Jazz Festival. We did that. And that was in the fall of 1980. And the people from Montreux, Switzerland were there and they heard us. And we were invited to come out the following summer, the summer of 1981, to play a Montreux, Switzerland Jazz Festival. And we also were invited to open the North Sea Jazz Festival at the Hague in Holland.

And about a month before this went down, President Reagan was in office and he terminated the CETA program. So we were all out of work. And I loved Reagan. You know, he did what was right.

But the businesses that we had gone out - we played lunch hours for General Motors in the factories. We played park concerts. It was all free, open to the public. And the businesses that were in town felt strongly enough about it that they funded our entire trip to Europe to pay for our hotels and everything while we were there.

And during this time Tom was in touch with me. You know, you need to move to Vegas. There's work out here. You know you can work.

Before we made that trip, as soon as we were terminated under the CETA program, I went to the unemployment office in Michigan. And it was pretty funny. I had never heard of it happening before. They sat down with me and they said, "Well, Mr. Textor, you're a teacher and nobody's hiring teachers in Michigan now," because of the effects of the automobile industry and people leaving the state. They said, "You're also an automobile worker, but you've been laid off and you're not going to get recalled on that." And they said, "And you're a musician and there's really no work for that. We strongly suggest you leave the state."

So I mean the writing was on the wall. And so I got back from Montreux, Switzerland, I think on

a Thursday. I had dinner with my folks on a Friday. Loaded a U-Haul van on Saturday and left for Vegas on Sunday. I got into Vegas - I think it was July 25th or the 27th of 1981. You know, sometimes you sort of look at it and think maybe there's just a little destiny involved out there, too, because I remember coming into town at night and seeing all the lights and I thought, I'm finally home.

Oh, that's great.

Yeah.

Now, tell me - do you remember what the Strip looked like in 1981?

Yeah. And I mean it's just hard to describe. I mean you didn't have the south end of the Strip. You had the Tropicana and that was about it. You didn't have anything. And at that point in time Bally's was the MGM. And you had the Aladdin and the Trop.

The old Aladdin.

And then further out - the furthest one south was the Hacienda. And, of course, the Hacienda's gone. And all the other hotels have built up.

I started out - my first job was with the Norm Geller Orchestra at the Sands hotel. And I started out doing relief night, just one night a week.

Now, was Tom working with the Sands, also?

No. Tom at that point had already gone to the Riviera. He opened the Aladdin hotel. He came in the mid 70s. He left the Miller band and went on the road as a trumpet player with Frank Sinatra, Jr. Then he got to Vegas after a couple of years of that - I think it was a couple of years. He decided to stay in Vegas and he wound up opening the Aladdin hotel. Then he went to the Tropicana show. Then he went to the Riviera.

So tell me about the Sands at that time because we're talking about the Copa Room.

At that point in time when I first got hired there, as I said it was relief night only and it was to replace the lead trombone player, Jim Huntsinger, who has since passed away. He's a great trombonist, absolutely

fantastic. And so I was just doing one night a week. But then Carl Fontana, a great jazz trombonist, was in the band regularly, but he was constantly going out on tours doing concerts and things. So I started being a regular in the section replacing him.

And at that point in time, we were doing - I think the name of the show was called Top Secret. And it was a topless show. It was a production show. And that only lasted for a few months and they went to star room policy. And so we started working stars. Come in and work one week at a time.

And what was it called, star one?

No. It's going from a production show to what they call the star room. So your stars would come into the room. So we were doing basically different stars each week.

And, eventually, they dropped the policy and closed the room. And so the whole band was laid off. And then I got hired at the Hilton to sub for a trombone player there.

Before you went to the Hilton, tell me some of the stars that you played with at the Sands.

That's a tough one to remember because it was a short-lived policy. I think we did Debbie Reynolds there. I'm trying to think of the guy that - he did puppets and one of the characters was this old lady. I can't remember who it was.

Oh. Madam and -

Yeah. And there was also a female impersonator that was working the room who was very well-known at that point in time. And I can't remember his name, either.

But then you went to the Hilton.

I went to the Hilton and they were doing a production show. And I was subbing for a trombone player that was out for six weeks with Diana Ross. And we got to the end of four weeks. Jimmy Mulidore was conducting. And Jimmy called me and he wanted to make sure I was happy with things. He said, "You never smile when you're playing." I said, "Jimmy, a trombone - you can't smile when you play." He said, "Well, I just wanted to make sure you're happy." And it was on a Wednesday night.

And Friday I went in to go to work because Thursday we were off. And I had gotten a call just before I went to work from the Sahara hotel to move over there on a permanent basis. So I went in and told Jimmy that I was leaving and he got very upset with me. He said, "You just got through telling me you were happy here." And I said, "Yeah, but it's only two more weeks. This is a full-time gig." So we didn't part on the best company, anyway.

But then I was at the Sahara for - I think it was about a year and a half. And I got called to work with the Al Ramsey Orchestra. And, basically, we opened the Golden Nugget showroom with Frank Sinatra. And it wasn't even a month after that that Al called me and I went on full time with the Al Ramsey Orchestra at Caesars Palace.

So tell me about the difference in working on the Strip and downtown at that time.

Well, downtown - the Nugget had been open and the Four Queens was going on. And they had Monday jazz. There were a lot of things going down there. There just weren't that many places, two or three places and that was it.

Steve Wynn had taken over the Golden Nugget and completely remodeled the whole thing. And I had been working down there in - they had basically a lounge area. And did Lou Rawls and a bunch of people that came into that area. And then they finally got the showroom done. And they brought Frank in to open that up. And so I moved up and we did the showroom.

And every time Frank came in down there, we played - they sort of worked it out. I don't know how they ever did it. But the entire orchestra from Caesars Palace would be off from Caesars and we'd go down to the Golden Nugget. And then we did the trip to Hawaii with Frank. We were there for about a week. And he took the band from Caesars Palace.

You know, we heard it through the grapevine and we heard him say it that he could've taken the band out of L.A. from the recording studios and he said, "Absolutely not. This is the best orchestra I've ever worked with. So we're going with you guys."

How did that feel to be part of what Frank thought was the best orchestra?

Oh, it was phenomenal. It's absolutely - matter of fact, some things have come out since then. A lot of

your stars, when you're working them, they'll do cassette tapes through the mixing board so they can listen to the shows and figure if they want to make changes - change tunes or change the order of the tunes or whatever. So every time we did Frank they were recording it, but it was for Frank's use.

Well, a year ago last February I went to the musicians union to pay my dues. And they said, "Well, you owe us some work dues." And I said, "For what?" And I said, "How much is it?" I thought maybe it was overtime from a New Year's Eve gig or something. And it was a sizable amount of change. And I said, Well, I can't understand it. "Well, you've got a check here." And I said, "A check?" And they said, "It hasn't been mailed out yet; we'll get it for you."

And that was from Capitol Records. And it was for the recording that was released, "Frank Sinatra Live in Las Vegas." And that was done at the Golden Nugget.

So I was very pleased with that. And then six months later I got a royalties check from that recording. And we didn't know any of this was going on.

I've got to get with Frank Leone at the union because I just got a newspaper clipping a couple of months ago from New York. And it's a picture of Frank. And the whole article is about the new DVD that's coming out, "Frank Sinatra Live in Vegas," and it's a video from Caesars and from the Golden Nugget and everything else. They're going to have to pay musicians for that again, too. So it's pretty exciting.

So now, how does the union continually keep on top of all of these releases?

Basically, if they hear of something happening, they find out about it and they research it. You know, Capitol released that CD and nobody had been paid for it. So they had to trace it down and find out who was working the show. And then we all got a check in the mail from Capitol Records.

So the union does a pretty good job of that. I'm going to decline other comments about what the union does or does not do.

So after the Golden Nugget - the Hilton was before the Golden Nugget?

Yes.

How long were you at the Hilton?

Just for the six weeks doing that production show.

And then at Sahara - that was all star room. That's where I started doing - I did Debbie Reynolds there. I did Don Rickles there constantly. I have stories about - Don was a great guy to work for.

Tell me about him.

He's just one of the nicest guys in the world. And people see him on the stage - they'd never believe it.

Right.

But he is just absolutely fantastic. There was always a gift from Don at the end of a week. He'd sort of pimp the band and we got to the point where we'd pimp him back. And it was -

Explain the word "pimp."

Well, it's just sort of practical jokes on each other. The one night it was his birthday and Ann Jillian was opening for him. And between shows she let it be known that there was a party upstairs backstage for the band for Don's birthday. Well, Don came out - ended her bit, and Don came out and did his opening routine and then he made a bit about his birthday. And then turned around and looked at the band and gave us an "okay" sign. He said, "Yeah, I want to thank you for the gift, guys." There was no gift. He was really laying it on us and showing the audience - apparently trying to belittle the band. So between shows we went upstairs to party. And they had all this booze. Everything was like half-gallon jugs. But they only could get pint bottles of Chivas Regal. And Don was a Chivas Regal drinker. So about three of us did a pint of Chivas down to the point where it may have had half an inch left in the bottom of it. And the lead alto player, Bill Horne, got a piece of toilet paper and tied a toilet-papered bow around it.

And we went in for the second show and Don opened - same routine. I mean I could do Don Rickles' show right now and it would be the same show. It doesn't change that much. So Don did exactly the same. He turned around and said, "Thanks for the gift, guys." And Bill stood up and he said, "Don, on behalf of the band, we'd like to present you with this gift." And he saw it had about half an inch and saw the toilet-papered bow on it. He went right to the floor laughing. He was cracking up at what we did

to him. So that kind of stuff went on with Rickles all the time.

I did Debbie Reynolds there. I think I said that. I can't think - I mean I did Tina Turner there.

Oh, tell me what that was like.

Oh, she is absolutely dynamite, absolutely fantastic.

I have seen her once.

I cannot believe where the energy comes from. She comes out on the stage and the whole show is a mile a minute, just constant movement.

In heels that high.

Yep, wearing the spiked heels. And just absolutely phenomenal to work with. There aren't too many that were bad to work with, but there are a few.

Who are some of your favorites?

Frank. Don. I think probably one of the best showmen was Sammy.

And tell me more about Sammy because I always fill that he's a little overshadowed by Frank.

Oh. Matter of fact, I was talking to somebody - the latest book that's out on Frank basically said that Frank idolized Sammy. And whatever Sammy did that's the direction of the Rat Pack. But, no, he - absolutely is a phenomenal gentleman to work with.

That's still going to break me up. But the picture you saw of me and Sammy, that was the first night I had worked him. I walked over to Sammy because he was waiting to go back on. He opened the show. Bill Cosby came out. Sammy was sitting on a stool and we were waiting to go back on. And I said, "Mr. Davis." And he said, "No, Sammy." And I said, "My name's Ron Textor." And I said, "I wanted to thank you for coming and doing this show." And he said, "What are you talking about?" And I said, "When I was in college I dreamt of someday doing the Rat Pack." And I said, "You're the only one I haven't done yet."

So it was pretty moving. And it brought him to tears. So that's where I got the picture. We became pretty good friends that week. That was the first week. And then he came back constantly.

And another great guy to work for was Liberace.

And Mr. Showmanship.

Yeah, he was.

So tell me about him because we've seen the pianos and we've seen the capes and all of that, but we have no idea what it could have been like working with someone that flamboyant.

Oh, he was just fantastic. At that time I was married to my second wife. Got her comped into the show. We came through the backstage. And she was standing back there looking at the rack of all the furs and everything. I think she was about at that time probably about a hundred pounds on a good day. And she was about five-feet tall on a good day. And she was admiring this fur coat. And all of a sudden she heard the voice. And it was Lee standing behind her. And he said, "Would you like to try one on?" And she picked one out and he helped her on with it. And I think the coat weighed 140 pounds. And he was just that kind of a guy. He was great.

During one of the engagements in fall of '86, I got word my father passed way. And I did both shows that night and flew out at midnight to go back to Michigan. And when I came back a couple weeks later, they were doing a different show. And I had a sub covering for me. I got back in town to do the second show. Just walked on. No rehearsal. Come in and just read the music down. And the bandleader, Al Ramsey, said, "Ron, have you been up to the band room yet?" And I said, "Nah, I just had a chance to unpack my horn." And he said, "Well, you need to get up there; there's something there for you." And I got up and there was a sympathy card and two bottles of wine from Lee and Artie Azenzer, his musical director.

But he was a fantastic guy to work for. During the last week - the last show that we were doing with Lee before he passed away, he was really scuffling, playing. Between shows he was back there very, very frustrated. And Artie said, "What's the matter, Lee?" And he said, "It just doesn't make any difference what I do; I keep playing in the cracks." And Artie looked at him and said, "Well, did you

think about moving the piano a half-inch to your right?" And it broke Lee up and it boosted his spirits. Musicians are like that, constantly coming up with a way to pitch - and sort of make light of it.

That's great. When I listen to you talk about this and your work and your life, it makes me think of the word "family."

Oh, yeah. Yep. Going back to any band you're playing, that's what it is. If it's not, the person really isn't that much of a family member to the group isn't going to be there that long. It's got to be the camaraderie. You know, you can have differences and there'll be arguments, too. But there's a genuine concern for everybody that's around you. I mean you're all - you know, it's the old story there's no "I" in the word "team."

(End Tape 1, Side A.)

Like I said I was a trombone player in the trombone section. And the trombone section is just one of the sections of the group. And everything comes together to come out with the overall sound that you need. And it doesn't make any difference if you're playing with a small group, a big band or a symphony orchestra. It's all the same way. It has to be for the outcome, the total sound that's going to come out of the group.

At this point in our history, in the 80s, how large are most of the bands?

Well, you mean on the Strip? It varies. I think they're using 11 or 13 for Spamalot. I think it's close to 20 with Phantom of the Opera. The Producers I think is somewhere in that ballpark, maybe 17, maybe not that many. They're not using the size of the orchestras that we used to have on the Strip.

And what were those?

Well, when we worked Frank that was a 45-piece orchestra. That was a big band and a full string section. And that was mandatory. Frank would not - when he came into the Golden Nugget and signed his contract with them, they tried to get him to do just piano and rhythm section like Tony Bennett does now. And Frank said, "Absolutely not. I'm a big band singer and that's the way it's going to be. It'll be this way or it won't be." And so they conceded to it.

Another person that was absolutely phenomenal for that - didn't use the 45-piece orchestra, but demanded a big band - was Joan Rivers. The only thing we played - but she wanted the appearance. The curtain was up. There was the big band. Joan would come out. She kibitzed with the audience and the band and made fun of us for a couple of minutes. And the only thing we played was "Anchors Aweigh." And there was no music for it. We all played strictly by ear because that's the only thing we were going to do. The screen would come down. We'd be offstage. She'd do her entire show. We'd be back on the stage. The screen would come up. We'd play "Anchors Aweigh" and play her off. But she demanded that she have an orchestra there.

She wanted the look or the feel?

Both I'm sure. The excitement of the big band playing behind her, but knew that that was the only thing we were going to do, and the appearance. Here she is on a stage at Caesars with a big band behind her. So, you know, she was dynamite for that.

And, of course, Sammy. They had to have that kind of an orchestra to do what they were doing. And it's a shame because that's what's missing now.

And there are some young artists. Toni Tennille. Toni was just a gas to work for. For opening night as soon as we got between shows, there were pizzas in her dressing room. There was a 17-piece band in Toni's dressing room eating pizza and talking. Then go back and do a second show. That was primarily an opening act. I can't remember whether she opened for - I think it was George Burns.

And there's another guy that used a big band. George didn't have that much music, but he demanded he had a big band there. And he was great to work for. A lot of the same routines but he was just - well, he had a lot of experiences to share. That guy had been in business and knew more about the business than probably the entire band put together. So...But, no, they were just fantastic people to work with.

So what happened to these big wonderful bands?

Well, a lot of the stars that used them aren't around anymore and there's no more demand for the big band stuff. And a lot of that happened when the hotels changed over, when the corporations - they got rid of

the mob because of skimming. Well, the corporations are skimming more money than the mob ever dreamt of. And when the mob was running the casinos and things, they took care of everybody. I mean if you did your job, it was fantastic.

Give me some examples. Explain what you mean by "they took care of everyone."

There was no problem. If you did your job, you were paid well. You knew that you were going to be back working. When I was on the road with the Miller band, we played a couple of mob clubs in the East Coast and that was when stuff was in New York. We played on Long Island. In that period there were a lot of country clubs being bought up on the East Coast because the word was they were going to legalize casino gambling all up and down the East Coast. So the mob was buying up these places.

At this point in time there were family wars and people being shot and killed in New York and the wars were on. And we pulled into one of those clubs with Buddy DeFranco in the Miller band on the bus. We pulled in and Buddy had received directions not to get off the bus. They were afraid that the mob was going to start hitting entertainers that other families were bringing in for their clubs. I mean that guy that had to be close to seven feet tall and three feet wide came on the bus. He had a cannon under each arm. And he escorted Buddy into the club to make sure that he was not going to be hit. Of course, he didn't care about the band. We just got off and got our horns and, you know.

But that was also - a week earlier Buddy Rich had gotten there and they had Buddy Rich's band following Woody Herman's band. And Buddy Rich was furious about it, so the story goes. I wasn't there. So this is hearsay. But Buddy said that if Woody Herman played one minute of overtime there was no way he was going to go on. And the word got out. And the people that worked there came down and asked Buddy please go with him; the management wanted to speak with him. Let's just say Woody Herman I think played a half-hour, 40 minutes overtime and Buddy Rich went on and played his entire contract plus, also. I think there was an offer made that he couldn't refuse.

Why would one bandleader be upset to go behind another band?

I don't think that's universal. I think that just goes with the personality of the individual bandleader. I mean I don't think it would have bothered Stan Kenton. I don't think it would have bothered - we went on after - I think it was someplace in Pennsylvania. We went on with the Miller band after Dizzy Gillespie.

And whoever booked that one - I could never figure out why you'd have Dizzy Gillespie on and then the Glenn Miller band. It just doesn't make sense.

Which is the favorite place? From that era when you were playing in the big bands, which location here was your favorite, and why?

I'd probably have to say Caesars because that was still - you know, this ended in about '87 is when the whole thing ended. And at that point in time you still didn't have a lot of the hotels that are around now. Caesars was the newest and probably the mecca of all of them. And that's where the stars were coming in, the major stars.

So some of the ones that you've told us about were at Caesars?

Yeah.

Where in Caesars did you play at that time? What was the room called?

It was the main showroom is all I know. But I think they had a name. I don't think it was Coliseum. I can't remember what they called it.

It probably was the one that closed before -

Before they opened the other one up for - is it Celine that's there now?

Yes. They closed one prior to that.

But that was the main showroom. And it was just a place - you know, magic things happened. I remember the first time I did Johnny Mathis and we were on the stage rehearsing. And all the way in the back of the showroom, not through the stage, but the main entrance to the showroom, I see this guy walking down wearing blue jeans and a varsity jacket. And he got to the stage and it was Johnny.

And there's another guy who was great to work for who has unbelievable stage fright. Johnny would come out and he would be shaking drastically. He'd do his opening song and immediately sit down on a stool because his knees would be shaking so bad. He had tremendous stage fright.

I never worked Liza Minnelli, but I understand Liza was the same way, scared to death backstage

until the spotlight hit her. And when she walked on, then everything was fine. So you wonder how they get over it, but they do.

That's amazing. I like these kinds of things.

Tell me about race relations within the groups and onto the groups as you traveled around the country.

God, I teach the history of rock and roll at the community college.

Still today?

Yeah. It's brought up so many times on that video. I'm trying to think of the one that really says it first. It's Carl Perkins. Carl Perkins is talking. He's being interviewed on that. And he made the statement that - Chuck Berry was talking with him one day. And this is going back to the 50s. And he said, "You know, I think we're doing more with our music for race relations in this country than what they're trying to do in Washington, D.C."

And there is no racial barrier in music. Now, there was in the early days of the Strip because Sammy would work the Sands, but he was not allowed to stay there until Frank said, It ain't going to be that way; Sammy's going to be able to stay where he's performing. But that was management.

There is no racial - I don't think I've ever experienced anything that I would say would be racist in a band. Matter of fact, up until a year ago we had a band that was working here. That was Jimmy Wilkins. And I originally worked with Jimmy Wilkins Orchestra in Detroit. That was when I was in college and I got a call. They had been giving my name for a sub. They needed a lead trombone player. So I drove down to Detroit to do the gig. I got there and walked in and I was the only white guy in the band. And I mean it felt strange. But there was no problem with anybody on that band. I was a good - I was a trombone player. That's the way they treated me.

What is it about show people, entertainers, where that's possible?

Well, I think it has to do with - I don't know about all forms. But as far as music is concerned -

I've heard dancers say this. I've heard people across the board in entertainment say this.

I think as far as music is concerned it's the universal language. So there is no barrier as far as that's concerned. Swing is swing. Yeah, there's Count Basie swing. There's Woody Herman's swing. And they may be different. It may be Duke Ellington, too. But it's all something that's trying to generate the same thing, trying to say the same message as it were. I just don't think people think about it.

I'm sure they did when - in the same video that I'm talking about when you listen to Gladys Knight being interviewed, talking about doing the tour through the South and being busted and all those things, yeah, that was - but, again, that was not entertainers that did it. So I've never seen that happen.

When we did the tour to Japan with the Miller band, there were no blacks or African-Americans on the band at that time. And that wasn't necessarily for any reason, just there wasn't. And we got to the south of Japan - all the shows there are early. At eight o'clock you're back in the hotel. Shows are usually at six o'clock at night. So we're sitting in a cocktail lounge. And I was sitting and I looked over. And I was sitting with Tom Snelson and another guy who's passed away who was on the Miller band with us, Kenny Wright. And we were sitting there and I said, "That's Freddie Hubbard." And it was Freddie sitting across the bar. So we went over and talked to Freddie. Sat down. Immediately talked to him. And then the next thing you knew we were up in his room having a couple of drinks.

I remember pulling in one night in New York City. Early in the morning we got there. It was one of the hit-and-runs that I mentioned. It was about three o'clock in the morning. Tom and I got in the elevator to go up to our room. And this elderly - wasn't real short, but he was really bombed, really hammered, got on the elevator with us with a pint of - I think it was cherry flavored vodka. And Tom started talking to him right away. And I'm thinking, What are you doing, man? And the next thing I know Tom says, Yeah, come on up to the room and have a taste with us. And I'm going, What the hell are you doing? This is a wino off the street, you know. He gets off the elevator. We go on up to the room.

And as soon as the doors close when he gets off, I said, "Tom, what the hell are you doing? What are you inviting that" - and he said, "Do you know who he is?" And I said, "No." And he said, "That's Marshall Royal," the lead alto player with Count Basie. So I said, Okay. And sure enough, 20 minutes later Marshall was up in our room having drinks with us and talking and everything like that.

So it's just one of those things that you - you may look at them and frown at them for maybe being hammered and you don't know who they are, but...

Right. Talk about that live music period versus the canned music that came afterwards.

Well, there's no comparison. I blame the public for a lot of that. I mean I was on the picket lines in front of Bally's at that point in time. And, of course, the corporations, they knew what they were going to do. They were set out to bust the musicians, period.

So tell me how that started. Tell me a little of the background through those picketing -

All the contracts with all the union groups are all at the same time. And they do it for a reason. And the first people they settled with was culinary. And the second group that they settled with was the stagehands. And they hadn't settled with us. And culinary and the stagehands crossed our picket lines and went back to work. And there was a major - I think it was UAW convention when I was doing the picket lines. They had already gone to taped music at Bally's. And when they went to taped music, they increased the price of the ticket at five dollars a ticket. And we were trying to explain to these union people, UAW that were here for conventions that were going in to see a show, Look, you're crossing our picket lines to begin with; they upped the price of it and you're hearing taped music. Oh, we don't care. They crossed our picket lines and went in. The public just didn't understand.

And what they did was they turned the music industry in Vegas back into a part-time job. And prior to that it was a full-time job. That's why I moved out here because I knew - I think at Caesars we were guaranteed - I think we had a 40- or 42-week guarantee. If they didn't use us, they had to pay us for those weeks. And probably because maybe the hotel saw the writing on the wall that we were going to start losing stars, they felt we're not going to pay that many musicians full time when we're not going to use them.

Why would one union cross another union's picket line?

I have no idea.

I didn't think that was even possible.

It's not supposed to happen. But, you know, you look at the differences - well, culinary people were probably looking at getting a 25-cent an hour raise. And we're looking at getting more of a guarantee of weeks and maybe another \$50 a week as far as salary increases. And they're not going to concern themselves with us getting a raise like that when they're just dealing with 25-cents an hour. So...

How long did the picketing last?

Oh, that was - I want to say it was over a year. We wound up losing our union hall, which used to be - you know, if you know anything about that. But you know where Hooters is?

Yes.

Okay. There's a huge building one block east of Hooters and that's the management for the hotel. That's the old musicians union. And it sits on the corner of Tropicana and Duke Ellington Way. That was our union offices. In the back of that was a full huge bar. And every night starting at eight o'clock a big band would play until 11 or 12. And another band would start at one o'clock and play until five in the morning.

In the union hall?

Yep. It was called Kicks Bands. And these guys working on the Strip would come in and play in big bands just to play different music and get together. And that's where basically people got to hear you play when you first moved to town. I think I was doing about 15 bands a week down there when I first moved here. And that's how other musicians heard you. And then as an opening occurred in a band, they'd say, Well, call so-and-so; I heard him down at the union hall and he's a good player and he gets along with people. The union never gets you a job. It's hearsay. It's who you know and that type of a thing. So...And that's where it all happened. During the strike when the strike ended, that property had to be sold to pay the attorney's fees. So that was the end of something that was the only place in the world like it. No other place in the world had a union hall like that and had music going on. We had game rooms. We had a huge room that was set up with pool tables. We had another room with ping-pong and then this huge bar.

So when we're talking jam session, that was the ultimate.

Well, yeah, big bands. You're going in playing other people's - you know, and there were a lot of

different bands at that point in time. Guys got heard there. I actually met Si Zentner years earlier when he came out and subbed as a substitute leader one night with the Glenn Miller band in Phoenix. And when I got to town I ran into him again. And he heard me play there. And the next thing I knew I was in Si's band playing Si when he got work.

So then your union really had no control over this going to canned music? There was no way that they could stop it?

Musicians were our worst enemies because that canned music had to be taped by musicians. And it was taped outside of this town. Some of it was done with university jazz bands. Some of it was done on the East Coast by musicians and they were paid to do the recording session. And they knew, in essence, that they were putting bands without of work.

You know, the corporations were very smart in what they did. They had done it years before in Reno and the Tahoe area and broke the union there. The next move was to do it here. And the next step was New York City. And it didn't work in New York. The cabbies in New York City said absolutely not. We're going to support the musicians. We're not going to take people to your hotels.

Oh, my goodness.

Cabbies stood up for the musicians and musicians are still working in New York.

So now, with the advent here of the Broadway shows and we have live music again, will that spread to shows -

Well, some of the shows, like one that is supposed to be coming in and opening and I've heard about is called "The Jersey Boys." And that's based on the life of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. Now, I worked Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons at I think the Flamingo for like a one-week engagement when they'd come in. And they had a book that had several horns. The show that's coming in we used two horns. And that's what was done on Broadway.

The orchestra for Phantom on Broadway is bigger than the orchestra here. But Phantom was rewritten for this room. They rewrote a lot of the music and they cut a lot of music out to stay within that hour-and-40-minute format.

Andrew Lloyd Weber came in and was here for the opening. He loves it. He thinks it's the best show of all of the Phantoms in the world. He thinks the one we've got is the best. And the guy who was producing it who's got I don't know how many Tony Awards - I think 20 or so - he said this is by far the best. And the other thing Andrew Lloyd Weber said is that he couldn't believe the difference in the orchestra. He said hands down there is no comparison. He said, "You guys are so far above anything that's going on in New York City it's unbelievable." He said, "I can't believe the quality of the musicians in Vegas." So I mean that's nice to know.

So now, we have more people coming back like Toni Braxton -

She's got a small group, a few horns. Nothing big, though.

Nothing big.

No.

Now, I did not go to see Celine Deon. Did she play to live music? I'm sure she did.

She's brought the band with her and it's from Canada. And, again, it's not that big of a group. So...

So it's not going to come back?

I don't know. I don't want to say no, it's not because I've always got hope in my heart that it will. And I want to go back to work on the Strip. Most of the playing I do - I'm on contract with the Philharmonic. And I've been with them since - I believe nine years ago is when we started. So I can count on that and some other things. Usually if the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra is coming into town with Bill Tole leading, Bill calls me and I contract the band for that. And I pick up some New Year's Eve dates and maybe a few other things. But I'm not working steady and that's what I want to do.

I just finished my 20th year of high school teaching. I teach mathematics at Clark High School.

Do you like that?

Not anymore.

Why?

Kids. They've changed. And parents have changed. And in the math field it's devastating when you've got kids in high school that can't add, subtract, multiply and divide because of the use of calculators that they're given when they're in third grade. And then they come into high school and they can't do this stuff. They can't pass the state proficiency test because you can't use calculators in the proficiency test. So it's really a frustrating situation.

But, yeah, especially after putting 20 years in, I'd much rather have enough music happening on the Strip where I can get called to go back on a full-time basis again.

Because that was the life.

Oh, yeah. I never wanted to teach public school. That was the last thing. But that was -

But you had a fallback situation. You could fall back on that because you had a master's degree.

That was because of two great people in my life. One of them was Stan Kenton and the other one was Woody Herman. And I met both of them at a young age. And both of them said, You make sure you get your teaching degree so you've got something to fall back because there will be times when work is going to be lean.

So now, what about other guys in some of those groups that you performed with who did not have that background? What did they do?

A lot of them had to leave town. During that time period those guys were making good money and they lived in some pretty nice houses. And all of a sudden there was no house payment coming in. And a lot of them had no choice. They had to leave town. A lot of people - not tons, but a good - probably 50 or so went to Branson, Missouri and opened shows there. Now I'm considering making a move there because some of the people that I worked with Caesars. One of them, a sax player, is a contractor there.

What would prevent the same thing from happening there that happened here?

It's a different format. It's not the casinos. It is a showroom, strictly for showroom. It's geared all towards retirement-type people. You've got Andy Williams doing stuff and people like that there are down there. They're going to continue to draw. So that goes on. But that's not really a 12-month job. I

think it's eight or nine months a year is their season and that's it. But still then with a teacher's pension and I'm already getting my musician's pension...And if I picked up eight months work someplace - and I can buy a house on the lake down there about 20 miles from town for about 165,000. So...

But now, this house is just beautiful. And I love the way you have it decorated with all of the - you know, the instruments, the music. How could you leave this?

Well, it will go with me.

But this is just so perfect the way you have it.

I'll just be figuring out how to hang the stuff and put it up in another location.

At one time lounge shows were really, really popular in Las Vegas.

That's where a lot of people got their start - Vic Damone, Don Rickles. A lot of that was because I think what the casinos saw was that - you know, those shows were inexpensive. Basically, they were free. But you go back in the late 50s when Frank was big at the Sands and the Rat Pack was doing stuff there, from what I understand the price to go and see them was 5.95 or 6.95 and your complimentary drinks was a half-pint of whatever booze you wanted. If you wanted Chivas Regal, that's what you got included. But the whole concept was get them into the showroom and get them cheap and then get them in the casinos and we'll take our money that way. I think the lounges became an expense they didn't need. So they got rid of it.

Do you see it coming back?

Not really. But it depends. Any of the music that's coming out right now - got a son who just turned 18 who's into Goth rock. And I'm sorry. Those people aren't old enough to spend the money to go hear performances like that live. And, especially, the hotels aren't going to put those venues in a main showroom. Well, the other son is - he's traveling with somebody that will book. He's doing the lighting for Justin Timberlake. He was in Europe from May until just about two weeks ago doing tours with him. And he's going into prep the light rig in L.A. tomorrow. He's going to be there for two days. And then he'll be back here for three. And then I think he goes out for another six weeks on tour with him. That's a venue that will draw.

A lot of your other - as long as you're not getting into the late teens - if you are talking about entertainers that are good for the 20-year-olds that have got money, they're going to work in the showrooms.

What do you think is the future for entertainment in Las Vegas?

I don't know that for sure. I think what's going to bring live entertainment or that seems to be working right now is the Broadway shows. Now, I heard that with the opening of Phantom and hearing the orchestra that Andrew Lloyd Weber made the comment that he for years has thought about writing a musical based on the history of Las Vegas. And now he is contemplating actually doing it. That would be great; to have a Broadway show originate here, not New York. I think that's a potential. A lot of people say, no, you're never going to be able to compete with New York. Well, when you've got on one corner of this town where the Trop and the MGM and that corner and intersection, there's more hotel rooms there in four hotels than there is in the entire city of Manhattan, I think it could work.

And we have the people coming in.

Yeah. I think it's something - you know, the corporates, the corporate heads and the management, people that are in entertainment management, you've got to make it feasible and be reasonable in your profits. But they need to stop thinking about every square foot paying for itself. They need to get back to the concept of give something to the people and then let them have fun in the casino and get your money from them there. People that founded this place, as far as when the mob came in and Bugsy Siegel and people like that, they knew what they were doing and they did very well off with it. So...

I think the other thing that you're going to see - we've been very successful with the Philharmonic. And we have the new entertainment center that I think is going to be done in 2010 or 2011. That's going to house the Philharmonic, the Nevada Ballet and Opera.

Now, you're talking about downtown?

Um-h'm.

So is that a sure thing? Is that going to happen?

Yep. Oh, that's definitely going to happen. And, see, the town has gotten so big that there's a demand for it. Before, the casinos didn't want to hear about any competition. But the major benefactor that started the Philharmonic is the Lady Luck casino. They're the ones that dumped a ton of money to get the Philharmonic going. Sheldon Adelson that owns the Venetian, he and his wife have been supporters. We did her birthday party. They hired the Philharmonic for her birthday party last year.

(End Tape 1, Side B.)

In Las Vegas I learned a new word when I moved here. It was juice.

Juiced on a gig. Juiced into a job.

So tell me about that when it comes to entertainment.

It's there and it happens. I mean but it's - I don't know that it's as much - it's just a necessity more than it's an evil thing. I mean you can't hire a musician unheard to put him into a band. As we said a band is a family. They have to be recommended. People have to know who they are. Of course, you know somebody - when I got hired at the Sahara, there was another trombone player that was very upset and he said that, yeah, I got juiced on the gig because I knew the lead trumpet player and the saxophone player and they knew the leader and they got me on. Well, yeah, they did.

But it was a matter of - that's how you get hired because you know somebody. But you don't stay on the gig if you can't play. So it's a necessity. Has it bothered me at times? Sure, because I wasn't the one that got juiced on. But it's been very beneficial, too.

If you have to look back at the various decades here in Las Vegas, what do you think - well, you probably answered this.

I was just here from '81 until it ended in '87. So...But I think the late 50s and the 60s were probably when things were - I mean I've heard stories about guys working one house orchestra in one hotel, getting off of that show, and jumping a cab to get to another hotel because they were playing in another orchestra in another showroom. So I mean those are the heydays. Of course, the money wasn't as good then, either. But it was still great.

But the cost of living was less, as well.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

If you had to look at some of the greats today that you would like to play behind that you can't because of the policy here, who are some of the ones that you'd like to play with today?

One name comes to mind. I wish he'd go back to using a full orchestra and I never worked him. And that's Tony Bennett. There's a monster. There's a guy that's been around for years, man.

You know, Vic Damone is still around, Jack Jones. These are people that are still good. They can still draw. But in a lot of cases they don't need the money anymore. They don't need the work. So why go through the hassles?

I'd like to see Toni Tennille come back. She drew and she's great. Does big band. Her father was a big band singer. And she was a great entertainer.

Debbie Reynolds was just in town. But she comes in, she doesn't use the big band anymore. And that's a drag because she used a big band very appropriately.

Could she demand it today?

In most cases they can demand it and the hotels will say, well, then you pay for it, which means it's got to come out of what they're making. Okay, I'll do it, but I'm going to charge you more. Then they'll say, well, we're not going to hire you.

Another guy that was very big in town is Clint Holmes. And Clint Holmes was an opening act for Don Rickles at the Sahara and used an entire big band, not just a couple of horns. He got out of the business, had his entire book rewritten for a smaller band and came back in.

The expense, the overhead is a lot of it, that's what killed it.

If you were teaching today music classes, who would you demand that your students study?

Well, I'd be demanding that they'd have to be listening to all the greats, big bands. Definitely your stylist - everybody in the Rat Pack. These are people that are just fantastic.

Tell me about your children. And do you encourage them being in the entertainment field?

Not necessarily in the entertainment field. But I think that all kids should study music. Dick McGee, who is the associate conductor with the Philharmonic, will do these children's concerts. I think we hit - in the matter of a week and a half exposed 20,000 students to instruments. And he makes the comment be part of it. And you can do that by either participating as a musician or as a listener. Be aware of it.

Now, all of my kids - and my youngest has just turned 18. He played trombone for a couple of years and gave it up. Didn't like that. He's been exposed to all my music since he was born.

My oldest son as I mentioned is touring with Justin Timberlake. He played trombone for a couple of years.

My daughter who is 32 and she's at Cal Davis, she has a doctorate in veterinary medicine. She graduated from Clark High School as valedictorian. She had been the drum major there for two years. She was the principal or lead alto player with the Nevada State - ah, I can't think of the name of it. It's where the kids from all over the state get together and do the band. And she was the lead alto player there. Her frustrations - she hasn't had a chance, because of her time frame, being as busy as she is - she wants to get back and play alto again. Yeah, I encourage her.

I showed you the things of my dad's. I started doing jam sessions with my dad and other doctors when I was like in the sixth grade, going and playing Dixieland trombone with them. The piano player that was working had put himself through college playing at the Blue Note in Chicago. And at one point in time when I was going back for my master's, I was going to go back and complete my premed and go into medicine. And my dad told me, "Don't do it." He said, "By the time you get out and finish your training, your internships, your residencies and you open up a practice, you're never going to get your money out of it because the government's going to be telling you what you can charge." And he told me that in the 1970s. So I'd say he knew what he was talking about.

Exactly.

I'm never going to quit playing. As late as it seems, you know, the income from it has definitely dwindled. I won't quit because it's just part of my life. It's enjoyment. It's you're addicted to it.

But what a great addiction.

Oh, yeah.

Is the union structure working today for musicians?

We don't have any clout in Vegas anymore. We lost it. Musicians would have been wise many, many, many, years ago with the breakup of the AFLA, CIO, and the Teamsters if they would have gone with the Teamsters. Then we would have clout and we would have had power. If we would have been with the Teamsters when the last strike hit in Vegas, we'd still be playing because the Teamsters would have stopped every delivery of linens and booze and food to the hotels. We would have had the hotels over a barrel. We don't have that clout. Never have had it.

I can't say that it's been mismanagement totally, but there's been a lot of it. You know, I'm not thrilled with some of the leadership we've had in the Vegas local. I think they've hurt us a lot more in most cases than helped us.

I want to end on a high note. You might have answered this already. If you had to play now with one person that you played behind before, just one person, who would it be?

That's tough. It's a real toss-up.

Okay. Between or among?

The main two that I'd have to come right off the top of my head would be Frank and Sammy. That's a real toss-up. The one thing I can say - well, Frank's voice was going. So maybe I'd go with Sammy because to me he's one of those few people you see work so hard to entertain an audience.

This is wonderful. I really appreciate this so much. And I want to come to back with a video camera.

Sure.

I'll probably ask just a few questions on tape. But we want some footage to use for various things that we might be able to use this project for in the future.

That's fine. No problem at all, Claytee.

Well, thank you so much.

No. It's been a pleasure. I'm flattered.

(End Tape 2, Side A.)

October 8, 2007. We're with Mr. Ron Textor in his home in Summerlin. Lisa and I together, Claytee.

How are you doing today, Ron?

Doing fine.

Wonderful. Ron, tell me what you're standing beside right now.

This is an Electrola. It was made by RCA Victor. It's one of the first electric record players that was ever made. I got it from my grandparents after they passed away. Not only does it play records, but it has the equipment to record, cut your own disk, as well.

That's amazing. Lisa, we want to get a shot beside that eventually.

Now, you're a trombone player.

Yep.

And you're standing in front of two beautiful instruments. Do those have any special meaning?

These are the two that I play right now. I've got about another seven back underneath the stairs in storage. But this is what I use for the Philharmonic. It's a large-bore horn for legitimate work. And this is a small-bore that I do for jazz work or big bands and things like that.

So are you going to play one of them for us today?

No.

Now, what is in this case?

This is a collection of instruments that belonged to my father. He was a doctor, but he always wanted to be a musician. His father said that he would be a doctor instead. I decided when I went back to graduate school I wanted to be a doctor. And he said no, you'll be a musician instead. But these are all horns that he collected. He was a trumpet player.

If I can do this without - okay. This is a piccolo trumpet. And that was given to him by a guy that he used to play gigs with. Go out and sit in and play. As a matter of fact, he was an Episcopalian priest who played organ in clubs and played pop tunes and jazz tunes. My dad played with him. He gave that to him.

This is my father's trumpet. This is rotary-valve flugelhorn that was given to him by one of his patients. His patient got it for a carton of cigarettes right after World War II. It's a Miraphone, which is very, very, you know, top-drawer instrument.

And then behind it is a bass trumpet and then a French horn.

Now, do you play any of those in addition to the trombone?

No. I had to study all of them, but I don't play them. I decided I would never play another instrument until I mastered the one that I had. And I haven't mastered trombone yet. And when I do, I'll go ahead and maybe try another one.

Great. You know, the last time we talked you told me that you and your brother had been kicked out of the high school band. How did that happen?

Well, my brother's got quite a sense of humor. He was ahead of me by three years. So we weren't in the band at the same time. The band director at that time, one of his key phrases if you were in trouble was you're hanging by that much thread. You're hanging by that much thread. And my brother played tuba or sousaphone.

And so one of the days before the teacher got into the room, my brother took a spool of thread and tied it around the bell of the sousaphone and tied the other end to the ceiling. And the band director came

in and saw it. He told my brother, he said, "You can leave anytime, Mr. Textor." And my brother stayed around for about another half an hour and then he finally got up and walked out of class. And the band director said, "Where are you going?" He said, "Well, you told me I could leave anytime and it seems like a good time right now."

And then about three years later I was in the band. And he wanted to have sectional rehearsals after school. And I didn't feel the trombone section needed it. And I was the principal player. And so when he said can you make it, I told him no, I couldn't make the extra rehearsals. Then he accused me of trying to destroy his band.

And what really topped it off was we were on the marching field one day and the drum major came up. And he said, "Textor, shape up or ship out." And I said, "What time does the boat leave?" And that was it; I was out of the band.

I see. So now, did you have that problem later on in groups that you played with?

No. No, not at all. But you have to understand my band director was actually a violin player. So he didn't know that much about band literature and it was really a boring thing. My junior high band was better.

You used a term before. You said read the music down. Could you explain what that means?

Well, when we do shows at Caesars or any of the other places I work, we do rehearsals. And basically you do a run-through. They pull the charts out, the arrangements, and you'll be doing a read down. You just go straight through it as fast as you can, learn the music and get it together. Normally, we did about anywhere from a two-hour to a three-hour rehearsal and that was it. Then we'd do the show that night. Only one that we did more than that for was Frank Sinatra. And Frank we had two days' rehearsal with.

Suppose you play by ear, can you do the read down?

No. Absolutely not. You have to be able to read music in order to do that. You've got to be able to read music, period. And there's a lot of talented people out there that do play by ear, strictly by ear, but not in that type of a setting because you have to be able to sit down and read.

So that means that they limit themselves by not learning to read music.

Absolutely. Total limitation.

The last time you said that you played behind this act that had a puppet. And I think the name was probably Wayland and Madame.

Wayland and Madame. That's right.

Okay. So that's right.

The last time you really did a beautiful job in describing the union hall that you used to have over on Tropicana and Duke Ellington Way. Compare that to the union hall of today.

There is no comparison. There's none at all. The union hall we had on Duke Ellington Way and Trop was a huge building with offices for our officers and everything. I think the credit union was housed in there, too, for a period of time. And in the back of it was a huge rehearsal room with a bar that was the full width of the room. And you'd go in there - well, before I was there, there was music going on 24 hours a day. When I moved here in '81, there would be rehearsals going on, but the bar wouldn't open until about seven o'clock at night or five o'clock. I can't remember exactly. And then there was a big band playing there from eight o'clock until about 11:30. And then there'd be another band come in around 12:30 or one and play until five in the morning. So the bar was open all the time. And it was 17-piece big bands most of the time.

So what do you have now?

An old house that's converted into an office. That's it. They do have a swimming pool in the backyard that doesn't get used for anything.

But you don't have anyplace -

No.

- to keep somebody who's just gotten to town?

No. Not at all. And what we had with that union hall to my knowledge was unique in the world. Nobody

had anything like that.

You used another term before. You said they had a book that had several horns. What does having a book -

A book is basically your arrangements, you know, whether it's written for seven horns or four rhythm and three horns or 17-piece big band. And the book just refers to the arrangement, you know, trombone book, saxophone book, lead alto book. I can give you a little plug right now so you can come out and see all that stuff on New Year's Eve because we're going to be doing the Jimmy Dorsey Band at the Suncoast.

I want you to show us some of the photographs that you have here on the -

Well, the photographs are just some of the people I worked with or worked for since I came to Vegas.

And we're going to take the camera off of this tripod. And we're going to follow you as you talk about some of them. And as you are talking about some of these people, I would love for you to tell the story when you first met Sammy.

Okay. Well, this is Liberace. I was fortunate enough to play his last concert that he did at Caesars Palace. He was a wonderful guy to work for. He had a good sense of humor, really fantastic artist.

Frank Sinatra. Opened the Golden Nugget with Frank. I did a tour in Hawaii with Frank. And I was on the last recording that they did - they just released it - "Frank Sinatra Live in Las Vegas." It was done at the Golden Nugget and I'm on that recording.

Now, the one next to it is Sammy. And I worked Sammy and Bill Cosby together at Caesars Palace. And this was taken later in the week. But the first night I worked him, we were on a break because Bill Cosby was on and he wasn't using the band. He was doing his shtick and then we'd come back on with Sammy to finish out the show. And Sammy was sitting on a stool waiting to come out. And I walked over to him and I said, "Thank you, Mr. Davis, for doing this show." And he said, "First of all," he said, "it's Sammy, not Mr. Davis." And he said, "What do you mean by that?" And I said, "Well, when I went to college, I dreamed about working the guys in the Rat Pack and you're the only one I haven't worked." And he actually got a tear in his eye and started crying a little bit. He was a wonderful guy, absolutely fantastic.

Johnny Mathis. Let's see. Linda Carter. George Burns was absolutely fantastic, wonderful guy to work for. And you have to understand of these people - well, everybody I've named so far used the orchestra. But like George Burns did very little that required actual use of the orchestra. He'd sing a couple of ditties and that type of thing like that but really didn't need an orchestra for his act.

Another one that was the same way was Joan Rivers down on the end. Joan never needed an orchestra for anything. But she would not go on stage without a full orchestra or a 17-piece band. All we did - matter of fact, we were talking about a book and arrangements before. She had no music. We sat there and we played "Anchors Aweigh" to play her on the stage. And then she'd go into her routine and she'd kibbutz with the band and make fun of some of us in the band. And then the screen would come down. We'd be offstage. She'd do her whole act. And then we went back on stage and the screen would come up and we'd play "Anchors Aweigh" to get her off the stage. But she never would work without a full orchestra or 17-piece big band.

And you earned the same amount working with her -

Absolutely.

- than any other -

Absolutely. Lou Rawls I did when they actually had a lounge at the Golden Nugget before they put in their main room. Lou was a great guy to work for, always funny. He loved - I made a Cajun-style catfish dish. And every time he'd come to town I'd take him some, take it down for him.

Don Rickles. Ann Jillian. Don Rickles was a real character and one of the nicest people you'd ever meet, absolutely fantastic guy. Never did anything to hurt anybody. It was all part of the act and he tried to make sure that people understood that.

I mentioned Joan Rivers. Let's see. Oh, the Oakridge Boys. Tai Babilonia and Randy (Gardner) - I can't remember his name. They were part of a skating act at Caesars with Dorothy Hamill. We did that. That was right around Christmastime as I recall.

The guy in the center is my father.

The man with the trumpet?

Yeah. Sort of a tribute to him. This is Rocky Lombardo, myself and Vic Damone. Dionne Warwick worked at Caesars. Debbie Reynolds worked all the time at Sahara hotel. Nell Carter with Caesars. Doc Severinsen with Caesars. Again, there's Vic Damone and - I believe it was Diahann Carroll. And then we've got the Lennon Sisters. We did those at Caesars.

Let's see. Toni Tennille, absolutely fantastic artist, really. She was great to work for. She would be an opening act for somebody at Caesars. And as soon as we were done playing her, we'd be back in her dressing room. The whole band would be back there. And she'd have pizza for everybody in the band. Her father was a big band singer. And her husband's father was a writer of music, tremendous writer of music.

Mr. Las Vegas Wayne Newton. And I won't say anymore about him because I'm being recorded. You wouldn't want to hear it.

Donna Summer. Susan Anton. Gladys Knight and the Pips I did at Caesars. There's Si Zentner, big bandleader. I worked for Si.

And then this one right here is - that's a picture at the old union and that's a picture of Carl Fontana and I. And Carl Fontana is probably one of the world's greatest jazz trombone players. He's no longer with us. But we were good friends. Tremendous guy.

So what are those things over there in that case?

Those are all record albums. Yeah, I still have a record player and I still listen to them. There are a lot of people that still think that vinyl is better quality than CDs. I don't know. But I've got a lot of those duplicated on CD now because they're going to last a little bit longer.

And then I've got underneath the pool table - you can't see it - I've got a whole mess of cassettes and things like that. And then the rest of it is what you see.

So is there anything else in the room that you would like to add?

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